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ABSTRACT

Based primarily on stories told by a male elementary school teacher and stories told about him by parents, staff, and children, this paper explores how the identity of this male teacher is shaped. The paper begins by telling a specific story of a student who had wet her pants and how the teacher addressed the matter. Recounted conversations with the teacher show how helping the student revealed a line separating him from the women on staff. The paper then summarizes three "strong" stories illustrating perceptions of males, school, and teachers; the wet underpants story is layered over these background stories to reveal that even in his capacity as teacher, the male must preserve exclusive male/female roles, he views his position within the school as precarious, and he reveals characteristics of a "superhero"--special powers, a weakness, and a mission. The paper notes how, overall, the stories illustrate how maleness shapes the male teacher's identity as a teacher every day, and how his experience of masculinity changes with the context and the relationships. (Contains 17 references.) (KB)

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Difference, Sacred Place, and The Superhero: Stories from a Study of a Male Grade One Teacher and the Shaping of his Identity

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Introduction

As I write this paper I pick up the photograph from the pile of papers on my desk. Looking at this photo, with the teacher's chair in the corner, the words on the chalkboard, the boxes lined up against the wall, I see a classroom. Even without students, I think the space would be identified by most people as a classroom. It could be virtually any classroom in the world, it has universal characteristics. But it is not any place – it is this classroom at this moment in time.

Even though the teacher and students stepped out of the room, their traces can be seen in the teacher's chair, the names on the blackboard, the notices pinned on the wall and the boxes on the floor.

Looking at this photo, the classroom only *appears* empty, but I was standing there with the camera in my hand. I snapped the photograph. I was a guest in this classroom for several months during the 1999-2000 school year, carrying out my doctoral research. I lived inside this classroom, coming to know the children and Peter Thompson, the teacher. This is Eastside Elementary School, where many of the stories in this dissertation occurred.

I listened to stories told by Peter Thompson, a teacher with four years experience, and to stories told about him by parents, staff and children. I listened to how he is storied by others on the school landscape, and how these stories shaped him (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I was thinking about how one teacher's multiple identities are shaped (Clandinin and Connelly, 1999). I wrote field notes, kept a journal, tape recorded conversations with parents, staff and students, collected student work and took photographs. In my dissertation, I intend to lay photographs and paragraphs side by side,

like a collage, revealing the interaction/intersection of stories. My collages assemble diverse images and text on a page, providing what Eisner (1997) calls "productive ambiguity", by which he means that the "material presented is more evocative than denotative, and in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity" (p. 8). Thinking of my research as a series of collages captures the complexity, ambiguity and messiness of the classroom life lived by this man who teaches young children.

"Eastside Elementary School" is a low, one-story building on a large playground. A row of portable classrooms along the south wall, once filled with students, now sit empty. Presently eleven classrooms in the main building serve 320 students from kindergarten to grade six. The school is close to ethnic restaurants, small warehouses, fast food outlets, gas stations and mini-malls. Years ago, when the school was new, this area included small factories and other light industries that employed large numbers of people. Over time, these closed, leaving the community in transition. The students in Peter Thompson's class lived in condominiums or single family dwellings, some neatly kept and others in disrepair.

Thinking about my dissertation as a series of collages, I intend to lay side by side my journal entries, field notes, photographs, students' work, discussions on tape, other research, poetry and my thoughts while writing. Collage is not just a metaphor for this research, but the research is expressed metaphorically in collage.

During my weekly conversations with Dr. Jean Clandinin, my advisor, we often returned to a small number of stories from the field texts. These stories came into our conversations repeatedly. I began to call them strong stories.

These stories are strong because they are rich with meaning for me. These stories seem to demand my attention. They provide substance for discussion. They link with numerous dilemmas. When I discussed these with Peter, they resonated for him. These stories invoked his passion, his words became emotional, intense. He would express his anger, frustration, concerns or worries. These are the stories that "clicked a switch" in Peter. Once, after an intense conversation, he apologized for becoming so emotional. These stories linked or connected our other conversations and thoughts.

I see the three strong stories as the background of the collage, like a triptych, which is a set of three panels, or pieces of art, mounted side by side.

This paper represents one part of this dissertation, and will not include the graphics. In this paper I will tell the specific story "Mandy's Wet Underpants." While discussing the story, I will summarize the three strong stories, "Our men are different", "This school is a Sacred Place, and "The Reluctant Superhero". Mandy's story is placed over top of the background stories, becoming part of the collage, providing multiple interpretations.

Mandy's wet underpants

Mandy joined the class two months into the school year. With her pale skin, unruly blond hair and ragged jogging suit, I noticed her the moment she entered the room. I introduced myself but she said little. I soon noticed that she needed extra help with every assignment, so I often sat at her table of seven students, and assisted them all. She seemed constantly concerned about finding the "right answer" and checked with me each time, before making a mark on the page. Her drawing of the teacher, with the arms and legs attached to the head, is missing the life and emotions of the smiling children

portrayed in the other drawings. Because I worked with her, every time I entered her classroom, she came over to talk to me.

But when she had wet her pants in class just before lunch on February 4th only her teacher could help. She sat in her chair with her head down, hidden by her folded arms – crying. I didn't hear why but she was talking to Peter. I did not know what was happening, so I took over dismissing the class, then waited for Peter in the staff room. As I discovered during our taped conversation later, Peter couldn't easily help her either. First, he described bringing Mandy to the nurse's room by the office to change her clothes. He asked the secretary to help.

It was hard enough for me to say "come in here and change your clothes" and I was the only one in the nurse's room, I pulled the curtain and closed the door and said "Mandy are you finished?" – that was enough. The office people were there and they set her up in there to change and all I did was knock and said "Are you done?" and she was there at the door and "here you go here's your bag" and she walked out and I wasn't alone with her and the principal knew I was there and what I was doing.

(Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

It was difficult enough to figure out how to help Mandy in her time of need, to help her get changed, to wait uncomfortably outside the nurse's room, to ensure that the principal and secretaries knew what was happening. He knew he couldn't abandon her in the busy office during the lunch hour so he stood outside the door and waited for her. After she left, he called her mother who told him that Mandy doesn't like school. In addition, Mandy had previously had a bladder infection, and her mother thought this might be the problem today.

When he arrived in the staff room and told the others about Mandy, this was the part of the story the women picked up and they offered him several suggestions. He relayed this to me later.

They suggested that she gets, maybe, different underpants and that I should talk to the mother about it. As a male I'm not talking to a parent about undergarments for her daughter - maybe the nurse or the principal. Then again, the mother said "last time this was an infection," I said "Well, had that been the case, it could be an infection now", like, I'm not going to suggest that until I know...

It was difficult enough to figure out how to help Mandy in her time of need, but this conversation revealed a line separating him from the women on staff. Not only could they easily talk to a child's mother about undergarments, in addition, they didn't even seem to recognize that this might be difficult for him. When he said "I don't feel comfortable as a male, I can't do what you are suggesting that I do, I don't think it my place," they replied that he better get used to this since he has daughters.

... they said "you've got two girls you better get used to it." Well, yes, with my own girls I can deal with this just fine, it's a different relationship. To me, that's not even applicable to this. They can understand intellectually that I may not be comfortable with a female student in this role - but emotionally they don't understand.
(Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

They went on to describe their own difficulties with infections. One woman said that she no longer takes bubble baths. As I listened to them discuss bladder infections and bubble baths I too felt slightly uncomfortable. In our conversation I told Peter how I reacted.

Usually in the staff room there are not issues that are uncomfortable for me – but as they started talking about bubble baths and one of them said "I can't even take a bubble bath anymore" I thought 'I don't want to know!' They would be quite comfortable talking with each other about that – and sometimes women apologize to me when they get into these conversations and I say "I've got a wife at home and I know about that ...but really...
(Garry: taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

Towards the end of this conversation with me, Peter realized that dealing with Mandy's wet pants brought many issues to the surface for him, and he previously would not have predicted that this situation could be so difficult.

Intellectually I would not have known this would be an issue, I might have guessed but when they actually made these suggestions, I knew I could not do that. When it comes up there is something inside of you that feels uncomfortable and you listen to that inner voice. Up until just an hour ago, that would all have been theoretical.

There's a line here, I don't know exactly what it is, but there's a line. We talk about issues for males in elementary. Yes, there are issues for men in elementary, but they are not good teaching issues, they are care giving role issues.
(Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

When Peter heard that inner voice he knew he had discovered a line. Peter and I, two men who teach young children, know that there is a line here, but where is it, exactly? The closed door revealed many lines, although I think the lines are more like walls. These walls are usually invisible and this event revealed them, brought them to my awareness. It is not the closed door, in itself, that revealed the walls, it was the child behind the door. It was the door *between* the child and the man. It was the responses of the other teachers. It was Peter's inner voice. It was a moment of school life. It was our conversation at lunch.

In the next section I lay this moment of school life over the three strong stories on the collage, "Our men are different", "This school is a Sacred Place" and "The Reluctant Superhero". I thought about what Mandy showed me, and I read Mandy's story differently in relation to each strong story.

The first strong story: Our Men are Different

"I think having stable men in the school gives them (the students) some stability. Some of them (the students) have no men, some have too many" (Cassandra, Oct. 4, 1999).

"It's nice to see a man that's warm and caring. There are so many men that are cool and aloof" (Melanie, March 1, 2000).

"Peter is sensitive. He's not the typical macho male" (Jennifer, Feb. 2, 2000).

Everyone in the school told me that the three men on staff were different from "other men" and that because of the differences, the men were highly valued. More specifically, "our men" were different from the men previously on staff, the students' fathers, husbands, typical men and finally, the men are different from women. The men bring balance, completeness, perspective and "it's natural" when men and women work together with children. At the same time, in the daily work of teaching, gender did not seem to matter, the staff were quite "gender blind", and I noted that the gender of teachers would never be the subject of a bulletin board display.

Bodies

So is this man different? Not that different it would seem. All it took was a child's wet underpants, and he was on the other side of the door. This story showed me that Peter and Mandy brought their bodies to school. This single classroom event brought the bodies forward in a way that demands this discussion, precisely *because* of the door between the child and the man. That door revealed so many lines and walls. Here we confront the physical, personal bodies of a man and a six year old girl.

Mitchell and Weber (1999), explain that "…in order to cultivate the mind, we mistakenly feel we must 'get past' the physical, personal body which can be distracting or even dangerous" (p. 127). Mandy's story brought the physical bodies into focus. But while we attempt to focus on the mind, we "teach with and through our bodies" and "children learn (or fail to learn) through theirs!" (p. 127). In Peter's classroom, for

example, manipulatives were utilized in order to allow children to learn through their bodies. Action songs engaged the children's bodies while they sang about letters or beginning sounds. In science, the students observed and measured the classroom insects. Recess and physical education allow the children to stretch and move their bodies after the constraining hours in the classroom.

While discussing ways children learn through their bodies is acceptable, the teacher's body is ignored. In their chapter entitled "Dressing and Redressing the Teacher's body", Mitchell and Weber (1999) argue that "the teacher body and its appearance need to be taken seriously" (p. 127). They point out that "discussion of the teacher's body is almost taboo, perhaps because contemplating the body unavoidably leads to the awkward (for educators) territory of basic bodily functions and characteristics, including pleasure and sexuality" (p. 127).

Peter was highly valued because of his perceived differences from other men. He was viewed as a man who cared for kids, who showed his emotions, who "plays basketball and ties kids' shoes". For example, while Jeff's parents considered their two children their greatest treasures, they felt "completely comfortable with Mr. Thompson". Because of these qualities, staff and parents admired and valued him. However, when Mandy needed help in this way, he had to turn to the school secretary. He had only one reason for standing out in the hall and waiting for her: his male body.

This reminded me of Allan's (1993) statement that men "felt that they must overtly demonstrate care for children and sensitivity to their emotional needs. But, behaviors, that are perceived as natural demonstrations of these qualities in women, are off-limits to men..." (p. 124).

Peter was known for demonstrating care and sensitivity to the needs of children, but suddenly he faced behaviours, (helping a child change her wet underpants), that were off-limits. The door separated him from the child, as well as from the women co-workers. Peter believed that he could not overtly demonstrate care for Mandy in the ways the women could. He showed sensitivity to her needs, by taking her to a woman, the secretary, to help her. Yet, as the women teachers reminded him, he is a father of daughters and knows perfectly well how to help a child change her clothes. Why couldn't he?

Allan (1993), goes on to state that men "who are elementary teachers are aware of others' attention to their maleness, as well as others' conflicting expectations and stereotypes of them as men" (p. 124). This situation placed him face to face with the attention of others, particularly the women teachers and possibly Mandy's mother, to his maleness. In addition he felt forced into preserving exclusive male/female roles, by giving over the care of this child to the secretaries, then standing awkwardly outside the door. While he participated in the care of his daughters at home, no doubt bathing and changing them, he could not do this at school, because he must not place himself in a position that may be misunderstood. He would not do anything wrong, but others might wonder about his intentions or his thoughts. He must demonstrate to others that he is safe. Thus Peter was forced into demonstrating that men keep their distance from children and women are good and proper caregivers. Simultaneously, all conversations with parents and teachers indicated that people trusted Mr. Thompson with their children. If he is so trusted, why couldn't he help her?

I think this touches on deeper issues. While researching this topic for the past two years I have been struck with how quickly conversations about my research turn to the subject of sex and sexuality. The subject is usually hidden in the text of the conversation and the comments are veiled. When I tell people about my research, they tell me about their favorite teacher, a man who taught them in grade five or six. Then, in many conversations, they immediately mention a teacher they heard about, perhaps someone who taught their friend, who touched kids. They add something like "People think these men who teach little kids must be gay or something, but of course I don't".

King (1998), in the only book I found about male elementary teachers, wrote that a "public perception is that men who teach are often either homosexuals, pedophiles or principals in training" (p. 3).

Peter's fear, then, is about perceptions. By staying out of the nurse's room while Mandy changes, he demonstrates that he is not a pedophile. He knows he is not interested in sexual relations with his students, but he must always ensure that perceptions about him are clear. He must behave in ways that show he is trustworthy. As an elementary teacher, he must care and be a caring person, but he must demonstrate that caring differently than women staff members.

Allan (1993), King, (1998, 2000) and Sargent, (2000), all talked about touching. The men in their studies expressed concerns about how they touch or hug students. As King argues, men are "caught in a no-win situation." (p. 15). Many men enter teaching for "relationship-oriented work lives" (p.15). Yet they are "scrupulously monitored by others and ourselves. Paradoxically, the target of all the monitoring is our enactments of care" (p. 15). Men "are viewed as sexualized in predatory ways" (p. 17) and touching and

hugging, are seen as sexualized activities. Thus, all touching between men and children is seen as sexual, and children, regarded as innocent, are always in danger. Thus, we seem to need the image of elementary teacher as a good mother, or as a virginal young woman. So Peter was placed on the other side of the door.

Here we have underpants, wet underpants, a girl's underpants, and to talk about them to a mother, *or even to write about them in this paper*, opens oneself to suspicion.

(It's a risk I'll take, since everyone knows this is an academic paper and not some kiddy-porn fantasy. But words are words are words. How do you know? ? Is it because I say to you "trust me, you know I am a nice guy"? Maybe I am no different than those pedophiles out there. Is it about context? Maybe one day I will be sorry I took this risk. Can the sacredness of university research protect me?)

Underpants remind us of panties, and panties of sensuality. Panties are only viewed on the pages of catalogues, or in the store displays before Valentine's Day. And men don't look. Especially at a girl's panties.

Peter avoided looking. He called on the secretaries to help her and this man's presence on staff created work for the secretaries. He assured his safety by informing the principal, also a woman, that Mandy was changing her clothes. He further ensured that he was beyond reproach by rejecting the suggestions of the other teachers. It was clear to them that he won't be going around discussing undergarments with any parents!

He is safer if he makes it clear that he is a safe man. He is not a pedophile. He is not the big bad wolf, preying on innocent children.

He must always be on guard, against the stories others may compose about his actions. He must monitor his behaviors consistently.

Age of bodies

Bodies exist in this world, and human beings measure the age of bodies, then we tie many social, religious and legal implications to that age. Certain kinds of relationships between students and teachers are always frowned upon, but relationships do occur. The age of each participant is important. In their book, Erotics of Instruction, Barreca and Morse, (1997) selected several stories about relationships between students (usually female) and teachers (usually male and usually at the college level). While these relationships are always conflict laden, at least the bodies are "adult", (although at high school, the students are often legally underage.) Even when the two are adults, the teacher is usually much older than the student which adds another level of complexity.

In the elementary school, however, the students are clearly children. An "inappropriate" relationship between a student and a teacher is clearly wrong in the eyes of the law, religious customs and dominant social values.

Or is it always so clear? Many women tell me they were madly in love with their grade five teacher. This is talked about as if it is perfectly normal for girls to fall in love with a male teacher, and boys sometimes fall in love with a female teacher. But because of the age of these bodies, nothing can happen. If no one acts out, if the feelings only result in unfulfilled fantasies, then all is "okay". The bodies cannot actually touch.

The age of the teacher is relevant as well. When I was young, teachers, parents and children alike responded to me like a big brother, or camp leader. I was "cool". And as King (1998, p.3) says, people also saw me as a principal in training. As a kindergarten teacher I was frequently asked when I was going to "move up the grades". Now that I am

middle aged, my relationship with children is changing, perhaps even ambivalent. Now older than a father figure, I am more like a grandfather figure. I wonder if I am more suspect - perhaps people wonder why an old guy likes being around little kids. I am no longer a camp leader, big brother or future father. As an older teacher choosing to work with young children, I think I must be even more careful.

Peter is a relatively young and inexperienced teacher. He experienced a situation like this for the first time. While he knew this was an issue, as he said in our conversation "up until just an hour ago, that all would have been theoretical" (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000). As a pre-service teacher, he learned about the code of ethics, and professional conduct, but when he was in the story, he felt there was a line somewhere. He was shaped by Mandy.

The place of the bodies

This story also revealed the importance of place. These bodies come together in small confined spaces. When so many people spend so much time in schools, the bodies are bound to touch – or at least come close together.

In Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) discussion of the professional knowledge landscape, they describe the "in classroom place" and "out of classroom place". Classrooms are described as "places of action where teachers teach and curriculum is made," (p. 12). Further, they see classrooms as safe, private places for teachers. When "teachers leave their classrooms … they enter a public place (p. 14).

Peter, in certain ways, felt safer on the out of classroom place. There others could help the child and observe (monitor) Peter's behaviours. In this moment with Mandy, he

was safer than in his classroom. He felt that he must be seen, with Mandy, only in public places.

Sexual activities are usually carried out in private places, in bedrooms. If children result, families may live in homes together. Even within families, sex is supposed to occur between consenting unrelated adults, not between parents and their offspring, or any adults and children.

When we refer to the school group as a family, we imagine "nice families", with a father, mother and children. In schools, most teachers are women, and male teachers become father figures. But when we call up these images in school, we exclude the sex. We are a family but we do not sleep together here.

The classroom, with its privacy, is too private for male teachers. The classroom, with the closed door and private home metaphor, can be a place of danger for men. Peter brought Mandy down to the office, to a public place, so that others could help her.

It is strange that it is better for male teachers if they have "proven their masculinity" by impregnating a wife and raising children. This way the man is clearly heterosexual, and *not* gay. But this must occur in a specific place, the private home, not at school with a staff member or student. So he is very much like other men, in that he engages in sex with women, which he can prove by displaying the child. The men teachers at Eastside, brought their wives and children to school, and were praised for doing so.

A photograph

Leafing through the December 2000/January 2001 issue of Educational Leadership, 58 (4), a photograph of a male teacher caught my eye (p. 34). The white,

thirty-something, male teacher is sitting on a chair at a child's desk. A black boy sits on his lap while they look at the boy's work.

Something about the photograph causes me to cringe. Why would I respond that way, a male teacher who is researching male teachers? But somehow, the man in the picture looks creepy to me. Did I look like this to others when I first taught? The photographer is present so this situation is "safe", yet what if this man always encourages kids to sit on his lap? Or perhaps it was posed.

The article is about the growing diversity in American schools, not about male teachers, and the generic, un-credited, photograph seems to simply fill space on the page. It seems to accompany, rather than illustrate. No caption ties the photograph to the article, and the teacher does not seem to be the author. Perhaps the male teacher and black child are meant to portray diversity. The article doesn't tell us.

This photograph reminded me that I hugged kids when I first taught, and they often sat on my lap. Anyone who knows children, knows that when young children are in the presence of adults they like and trust, they touch the adult on the arm, or move closer to sit on the adult's lap. In the classroom, I no longer allow them to sit on my lap. Sometimes I feel as if I am pushing them away.

Keith, one of the men in Sargent's (2000) study, stated that "Women's laps are places of love. Men's are places of danger" (p. 416). This captures again the notion that women are safe and nurturing and men are dangerous. Even though I taught young children for years, my reaction to this photograph shows tell that I fear the man's lap might be dangerous.

When I was in Eastside Elementary School I was always aware of the bodies of others. I noticed the spaces between myself and children. Children in the school tended to hug teachers quite easily, and many hugged me as they passed me in the hall. However, even in a school where kids felt comfortable hugging adults, I did not see any child sitting on an adult's lap. Children did not sit on the laps of women or men. So I can't help but wonder why the boy is sitting on the teacher's lap.

Perhaps he looks creepy to me simply because I don't know him. I don't know if he is like other men, or isn't like other men. I don't know who he is. I don't know how he is, with children.

I wonder what this shows me about my shaping of my identity as a teacher. I describe myself as a teacher: it is who I am, as well as what I do. Yet, perhaps when I look at this photograph, I am afraid that I see him, as others might see me. I am afraid that I might look creepy to someone who does not know me. So even though I trust my intentions, it is important to be aware of how I look to others. Thus, as King (1995) says, I monitor myself.

What is "typical"?

Through many conversations I recorded in the school, typical men were described as loud, brazen, uncaring, aloof and insensitive. In contrast, the three men on this staff were described as kind, considerate men who were good with kids and loved their wives. Even Peter recognized that he was, in many ways, not typical. Everyone seemed to agree about the characteristics of "typical men".

While people attempted to describe Peter's qualities, they did so by describing men in negative terms.

I wonder about this image of men. I wonder what behaviors are "typical"? As I attended conferences throughout 1999 and 2000, I heard the term "hegemonic masculinity", and decided that this comes closest to describing "typical men."

Baca-Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Messner, in their introduction to the book Through the Prism of Difference: Reading on Sex and Gender, (1997), helped me to understand hegemonic masculinity by discussing Connell (1987, 1995). They write that "Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity (the dominant form of masculinity at any given moment) is constructed in relation to femininities as well as in relation to various subordinated or marginalized masculinities" (p. 4). Hegemonic masculinity, or the dominant form of masculinity, is basically white, middle class. When masculinity is constructed in relation to femininities, the kinds of issues faced by Peter when teaching primary school, are brought forward. When I heard staff members describe "our men" as different from (and better than) the students' fathers, I think this showed masculinity constructed in terms of marginalized masculinities. In other words, teachers represent the dominant culture and the students' fathers represent marginalized masculinities. In the introduction, they go on to say that as "Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (in this book) argue, this 'othering' of racialized masculinities helps to shore up the material privileges that have been historically connected to hegemonic masculinity" (p. 4). So even though Peter may be considered a feminized male because he teaches young children, he is also a member of the privileged group. Thus, he is a typical man. "When viewed this way, we can better understand hegemonic masculinity as part of a system that includes gender as well as racial, class, sexual, and other relations of power" (p. 4). This helps explain some of the contradictions I heard as people described Peter.

Can Peter be typical and not typical at the same time? Does he view himself as a member of the privileged group, as a representative of hegemonic masculinity?

In their article in the same volume, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1997), describe the attitude of students in their university classes, who seemed to think that traditional men were "out there" and not in their classes.

> They are not us; we are the New Men, the Modern, Educated, and Enlightened Men. The belief that poor, working-class, and ethnic minority men are stuck in an atavistic, sexist 'traditional male role, while White, educated middle-class men are forging a more sensitive, egalitarian "new" or "Modern male role," is not uncommon. (p.58)

This appears to describe the attitude I heard in the school. The students' poor, working class fathers, were not like the men on staff, because they were stuck in the old ways of being male. However, as Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner reminded me, these conversations about the teachers on staff ignored their "structural positions of power and privilege" (p. 58). They are all, after all, White middle class men.

I wonder if rather than being "different from typical men", Peter showed us that masculinity is not fixed, but is "a social construction that shifts and changes over time as well as between and among various national and cultural contexts" (Baca-Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Messner, 1997, p. 4). In this context, he represents an enlightened, "New Man". In other contexts, he represents other masculinities.

The comments I heard often expressed a fixed notion of masculinity and femininity, and the behaviours described represented a generally negative view of men. Peter showed me that there are many ways to be a man, indeed, there are many masculinities.

Being a father and a father figure

In Mandy's story, Peter did not help her himself, but called on a woman to help. He cared, and showed his caring by helping her, as much as he could. He did not abandon her.

I do not know if Mandy's father would have helped her, so I do not know if Peter behaved differently than the child's dad. However, whether or not Mandy's father would help her, he might not like Peter to help her. Peter would certainly help his own daughter, but perhaps would not want his daughter's male teacher, if she had one, to help her change. As a father, Peter could do some things that he could not do as a father figure.

This is not what staff members meant when they indicated that the men on staff were different from the students' fathers. While many staff thought the male teachers were different from the students' fathers, they explained that the male teachers provided more positive models of male ways of being. However, I see that certain behaviors that are acceptable at home, are not acceptable at school. Mandy's story revealed a moment when the male teacher could not behave like the "good father" while at school. It would not be acceptable if Peter played with students as a father might, such as "roughhousing" on the floor. He could not rock a little girl while she goes to sleep. He could not help Mandy change her clothes.

This reveals the complexity Peter lived out in his daily work. Peter was like typical men in many ways, yet was described as unlike typical men. In this instance he felt forced to keep his distance when Mandy needed help, yet was valued for his ability to show his connections with kids. He could not actually do what "good fathers" might do at home, yet was valued as a positive father figure. I see that it was not the action itself, that was problematic. It was the context and the relationships. With these people in this place,

he could not act in certain ways. None of these boundaries on his behaviors were obvious or visible. How was he to know what to do?

For Peter, he knew what to do when "there is something inside of you that feels uncomfortable and you listen to that inner voice" (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000). His inner voice served him well that day, but I wonder if can he rely on that inner voice each time. I wonder when his inner voice is not enough.

Embodied knowledge

Mandy's wet pants reminded me that bodies were present. In schools, many bodies come together in small spaces, yet learning is supposed to occur in the minds. We rarely talk about body (or less often about spirit) in discussions about teaching and learning, as if curriculum needs only brains. Yet we each have a body, live in a body, and our bodies take us to school, where we meet other bodies.

> Teaching necessarily occurs through the body. Although its presence is obvious, the 'teacher-body' is too often neglected, avoided, or taken for granted in an uncritical manner.
>
> However, the way the body and its various features are conceptualized, manifested, interpreted, and lived depends very much on prevailing cultural norms. Are teachers thought to be exempt from all this? Is the body not essential to both our sense of self and our teaching identity and practice?
> (Mitchell and Weber, 1999, p. 125)

If the body is essential to our sense of self and our teaching identity, how is the *male* body essential to Peter's teaching identity and sense of self? Peter and I noticed how his *male* body influenced the ways he could offer support to Mandy. In this research project I reflected on how perceptions of maleness influence the reactions of others to Peter's presence in the classroom. I wonder if the teacher-body is usually taken for

granted because elementary teachers are predominately women. When the teacher-body is male, others notice.

This study has caused me to re-consider "embodied knowledge". Clandinin and Connelly (2000) see "teaching and teacher knowledge as expressions of embodied individual and social stories". I realize that I never thought of this knowledge as embodied in my *male* body. I read "embodied" in a disembodied way. Now I notice that Peter's male body informed his teaching practice. Embodied knowing must consider the gender of the bodies and the nature of the work.

Mitchell and Weber (1999) go on to state that not only do teachers teach through their bodies, but "students learn (or fail to learn) through theirs! In classrooms around the world, students are made to sit for long hours in hard chairs, overcoming their physical discomfort through force of mind, ostensibly concentrating on their lessons" (p. 127). I now see that in our conversations about Mandy, none of us, except her mother, wondered how Mandy felt that morning. We did not wonder whether Mandy failed to learn her math. Only her mother alerted Peter to the possibility that Mandy might not like school. I had noticed her physical appearance, and wondered about her physical health. She may have been concentrating on her lesson before she wet herself, but did not concentrate on her lesson after. She put her head down and cried.

What is clear, however, is that on February 4th, Mandy's body was present in school. But what did she learn?

The second strong story: This school is a Sacred Place

"Everyone gets along on staff, there are no little groups, you can sit beside anyone on the staff and feel comfortable" (Corinna, Feb. 28, 2000)

"There is a community, a connectedness here... (Annette, Jan. 6, 2000)

"...this school is a safe haven..." (Catherine, Jan. 10, 2000)

"You have to believe that every time a child comes through this door, that you are making a difference" (Adelina, Jan. 27, 2000)

"Every child in the school is your responsibility...(Shauna, Jan 11, 2000)

While I taped conversations with parents and staff, I heard repeatedly that this school was special. I heard that you could sit beside anyone in the staff room, that they had a mission and that this building was a safe and caring place for kids. I listened to the words used by staff and parents, such as believe, safe, caring, compassion, committed, connected, support, haven, every child, responsibility. While thinking about Eastside Elementary School as a special place, I realized that schools, in our culture, are viewed as sacred places. This school is sacred in the sense that it is valued and honored by staff, students and parents as a gateway to the future. It is sacred because it belongs to the legacy of public schools which were developed to prepare the child for "a responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among people..." (Article 28, The United Nations, Rights of the Child).

How did the special school, embracing a sacred place, influence Mandy's unfolding story?

This Sacred Place is precarious for Peter

For Peter, the school continued to be a sacred place. This story did not threaten his belief about children, education or this school. But he saw his position in that place is always precarious.

He felt supported by the secretaries and principal when he needed their help. He felt supported by our conversations since I was part of his landscape. While he felt frustrated with the women teachers in the staff room when they did not understand his situation, he continued to like them, because they were his friends. He could still sit beside anyone in the staff room and openly share his teaching stories.

However, while he could sit beside anyone in the staffroom, he could not go beyond that closed door. In an instant his stable place in this school became precarious. The door revealed the wall that separated him from the child, and from the women on staff. At that moment his safety depended upon separation. He was safe because the door was closed.

The community supported Mandy. She was not sent home wet and uncomfortable but was assisted by several staff members. The school provided a safe and caring place for Mandy, a living example of their belief that all teachers felt responsible for all children.

I do not know what Mandy's parents thought. A few weeks later, they vanished before I met them. One day, Mandy and her sister did not turn up for school, and later the secretary learned they moved. Their view of the sacred place is unknown.

Other parents such as Peggy, Albert and Janine, who described Peter and the school in positive terms, had known him for longer than the three months that Mandy was present in this class. So perhaps her parents did not have time to feel the school's special-ness. On the other hand, two weeks after the event, Mandy's mother sent a cake for the Valentine's Day party.

Greene (1995) writes that individual identity "takes form in the contexts of relationship and dialogue; our concern must be to create the kinds of contexts that nurture – for all children – a sense of worthiness and agency (p. 41). I see that Peter works in this kind of context, I am not sure about Mandy.

Caring hands

Later, in the same conversation about Mandy, Peter, who is trained in first aid, talked about touching children in an emergency.

I even had girls come to me because they feel they've scraped their back and I haven't lifted up the back of their shirt to look at their back. Mind you when a girl has fallen off the playground, and is laying there in pain, I'm not going to say "get up and go see a female teacher" I'm going to be the one dealing with it.

There's something that supercedes an issue like that, and that's called concern for your life and your health and it's an emergency situation. If I had to feel around for broken bones and sometimes you have to lift up their shirt - and I would do that I wouldn't wait – to say "go get a female teacher". I'm the one who has first aid training and I would do it. Whatever the consequences there's something called this is an emergency first aid situation and that would supercede any sexual issues. I would be very surprised if they ever came up in that situation.

The first thing you do in first aid is a body check and you feel their body. If they're lying there and can barely move you got to assess where they hurt. You don't touch their breasts or anything like that but you have to check their arms, their back, their buttocks area, so my hands would be all over their body, their stomach, even down here for internal bleeding you have to check the firmness all the way down to your pelvic area. I would do it, no question, and I don't think anyone would question. To me, the emergency situation is not tricky at all.

I wonder if it would be so clear! While discussing Mandy, he noted that "up until just an hour ago, that would all have been theoretical." This conversation with me has brought these issues forward. Our conversations have shaped his awareness. After Mandy, and if he needs to deal with a hurt child, how might he react? Before beginning his first aid response, will he stop for a split second and make sure other teachers are

present? His hands are allowed to comfort a child in one situation, but they were viewed as threatening and dangerous by Claudette's parents in the next story. I wonder if he will stop for even a brief moment and reconsider his actions when facing an injured child.

Mandy's "incident" had impact on this research as well. This opened up the conversation between Peter and I about the complexity of relationships between men and children. Without Mandy, we might not have talked about issues around hands, touch, children, caring and the fears lying just underneath the surface of Peter's daily life.

An element of truth

This was not the only incident that reminded Peter that he could easily fall from grace. Another incident with a different child, Claudette, scared him more than this incident, because the incident involved accusations that contained an element of truth. In this story, the school was NOT a safe place for Peter.

One day when I arrived for our meeting I could tell he was distracted or upset by something and I wondered for a moment whether I should not intrude. I asked him if he still wanted to talk, and to tape the conversation. He wanted to, saying, "This is important."

He began by telling me he was photocopying early that morning when Claudette's mother arrived at the door.

I was at the photocopier and she said 'we need to talk' and I said "okay" and I went in the hallway and she said "no, can we talk privately" and that right away got my heart racing, thinking 'what what?' so we went in one of the offices, and she said Claudette said that I was yelling at her, that I grabbed her, that I had hurt her and she was emotional and said "I have witnesses, this is what my daughter said", and it was a very accusatory tone...her tone, her manner, her intonation, were all that she believed that, she was basically saying that, it happened, and she said, "My husband is so livid about it I told him not to come."

That's how she introduced the whole thing. I said "Before anything else, I need to get the principal in on this conversation, I can't talk about it unless she is here, this is serious enough that I need her here".

(Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

Any teacher would ask for the support of the principal in this situation. However, I cannot help but notice the similarity between this story and Mandy's. Peter must ensure that others are present when faced with parents or children in a crisis. The sacred place must support him.

I went to see Adelina and when I tried to tell her about it I started crying, because I was so shocked,... I was flabbergasted, I was feeling very much accused, the first thing that ran through my mind was ' well, my teaching career is over, here we go, my career is over and it just started." I took a deep breath and tried to get control, Adelina went to talk to her first and then I went down, to talk.

I remembered when I grabbed her by the arm, it wasn't in anger, she was running down the hallway and I was trying to talk to her. I was saying, "Claudette, Claudette," and she wasn't hearing me and I reached out and I nabbed her as she was twirling and whirling down the hallway like she does, and I said to her "listen you need to stop."

Now she was being so silly and so disruptive in the hallway and noisy and screaming and running down the hallway, that I said "you are out of control, you need to stop right now." And I said it in a very firm voice, and she had pushed me all day, and so I might have said it a little more strongly, and her sister was in the library, and they heard me...but my voice carries, I don't have to be yelling and they hear me next door, so her sister and her friends, those three, when they went home, they were the witnesses, based on something they had overheard. And I was thinking, a teacher can be so easily ruined, it goes on your record and you could have trouble getting a job anywhere.

(Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

The witnesses had only heard Peter's voice in the hallway. By the time the children arrived home, the event took on a larger meaning. The family read the event in other ways than did Peter. They felt it necessary to confront the teacher, in addition, the father was so livid that he was asked to stay home. What might have happened, had he arrived in the photocopy room that morning?

By the end of the conversation, her mother apologized to Peter for jumping so quickly to conclusions, and agreed that her child comes home with only one version of any story. She apologized for upsetting Peter, and said she would come in to the classroom to volunteer. They agreed that they need to communicate regularly about her child. Later, the principal told me that in her meeting with Claudette's mother, the conversation turned to Claudette's school difficulties, and to other problems at home. Claudette was not progressing in her learning, and was displaying many off-task behaviors. While her mother was aware of these concerns and was seeking guidance from the school, she also responded with blame. When the child came home with the grabbing and yelling story, she responded emotionally.

So even though the meeting ended on a positive note, and the parent, teacher and administrative team came to agreement, I asked Peter how he felt now.

Scared. I feel scared. I think this will happen again and I wonder will they come in and ask? It scares me that a child can be so starved for attention that they will not even think, because they don't understand ruining someone's career. I really feel scared, it is a reminder how precarious our position is. And for a male, I think that in society males have the stereotype of being aggressive, not being able to work with young kids, and males being angry, so if it's going to happen, of course it will happen in a male's class. So it scares me because my voice carries, if I grab someone I could hurt them, and when you hear of offenders it's almost always men, and there is a stereotype that makes it particularly dangerous for males, and it is a very big issue for me that I can't even feel that I can be real...

(Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

He feels he cannot be real, he must always be on guard.

King (1995) writes that primary teachers feel they must "be there" for the children. Being truly present seems essential to forming genuine relationships. For example, Annette, a staff member, praised him for being himself when she stated that "...just by watching him teach you can tell that what he is here, he is at home" (Annette,

taped conversation, January 6, 2000). Yet Peter felt that he could not "be real" in the classroom, could not be himself.

At that moment, the school did not feel safe to Peter. His position felt precarious, and if the child's parents had decided to pursue him, he wondered whether they could have ruined his career. This school was described as a safe place for kids, but did not feel safe that day, to the teacher.

I wondered if this one event this one day changed him. His answer portrayed his ambivalence and confusion.

I certainly will not give someone a hug – but yesterday a child came in and knocked off my tarantula magnet and broke another leg off she was so upset and crying that I hugged her, and all the other kids were around... I don't think I'm going to change that. But I will not ever touch a student if I am alone, if I have to talk to someone firmly I will not restrain them I will stand in front of them or I will call another teacher and ask for help. I will watch how I restrain or touch someone.

If someone is going to say 'he touched me inappropriately', it's not done in public, it's done in secret.
(Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

First he stated that he would not hug a child, then remembering a recent incident when he comforted a crying girl, retracted. Then he thought he would ask others for help, and thought that usually sexual misconduct occurs in private, so he would be safe from those accusations. Again, Peter experienced contradictions in his life.

The real fear in this story was that Claudette told the truth, he had grabbed her and he had raised his voice. He instantly concluded that this would be different for women teachers.

The fear here is there is an ounce of truth, I did talk to her firmly and yes I did hold her, but taken to the nth degree it becomes a lie. It is an ounce of truth and a pound of lie. We talk about equality in education, in terms of males and females and we need more males and you know what, males do have that stacked against them, and I will say we come with the cards stacked against us.

It's the same stereotype that says men are burly, rough uncaring, the same stereotype that we need more men in elementary and the same stereotype that makes it dangerous. And it's a catch-22, it's like we want it, but we don't, we need it, but we don't.
(Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

King (2000), tells us that for the men in his study, discipline was "pre-configured for them as male, authority based, and threatening (to others)" (p. 12). The assumption is that men were "better able to provide 'problem' students with needed discipline" (p.12). Peter, in our first conversations, had noted that people assumed he could provide discipline for certain students. However, this story reveals the dangerous side of this assumption. The characteristics associated with this aura of male discipline, such as a loud deep voice, and strong hands, are the same characteristics representing male danger.

This incident shapes Peter's teaching. Even when he protested that he would not change or society has won, I fear he will change. Peter will be more careful. This incident will add to the dozens of other small school events that shape his work. The fear he felt does not "go away". He may become afraid of the students and their parents.

This school is a special place for staff and students. Yet, at the same time, this man felt threatened. Even though the administrative team and other teachers supported him, he still felt threatened. He wondered if this place could protect an innocent man. I wonder - how sacred is the place?

Ethic of Care

King (1998) discusses these issues at length. He points out that while "caring is an important aspect of teaching at all levels, love and care, as well as other nurturing behaviors, are privileged attributes of primary teaching. Care is synonymous with primary teaching." (p.12). In our culture, caring is attributed to women, and caring for

children is viewed as women's work. Indeed, primary teachers are predominately women. But as Kings points out, if primary teaching is read as caring, and caring signifies a female way of knowing, then men who choose to teach in these classrooms may be at risk" (p. 3). This story shows that for Peter, a man with a strong ethic of care (Noddings, 1992), needed to monitor how he demonstrated his care.

This story also reveals that caring, in primary classrooms, is often interpreted to mean the adults should be warm and "huggy" people, who are "nice". Men who do not wish to hug may feel that they do not belong with young children. However, when Noddings states that the ethic of care emphasizes "living together, on creating, maintaining and enhancing positive relations" (p.21), she does not tell us that teachers and students should hug each other. She states that "the need for care in our present culture is acute", (p. xi) and that we should "educate our children not only for competence, but for also caring" (p. xiv).

As a primary teacher and father of sons myself, and knowing not only Peter Thompson but my other male friends, I know that men are capable of care and can show caring in multiple ways. Perhaps Peter Thompson's story shows us that when caring for young children is interpreted as hugging and touching, then this is a limited interpretation of care and caring.

How care is expressed is complex. It seems to me that if men are to play a role in elementary schools, everyone, men and women, must explore multiple interpretations of caring.

Peter cared very much for Mandy that day. He read her body, sitting hunched over the table with her head cradled in her arms. I saw him sit on a chair beside her to find out

what was wrong. He did not know then what had happened and he immediately focused on her while I took the others to their coats in the hall. He brought her to the nurse's room, with her bag of spare clothes and ensured that she wasn't alone. He called her mother. He could not be accused of not caring.

The third strong story: The Reluctant Superhero

"He is the most amazing man" (Annette, Jan. 6, 2000)

"He did wonders for my son" (Peggy, Sept, 24, 1999)

"I just love him. I'll tell you lots of good things" (field notes, Sept. 16, 1999)

"He's not just here for the job.... We look at our children as our greatest treasures. We feel completely comfortable when they are with this teacher" (Albert, Mar. 14, 2000)

I heard that Peter was amazing, changed lives, did wonders and put himself into his work. I called him a superhero after I "added up" the comments I heard. I called him reluctant, because he did not seek superhero status, it was laid upon him by others. I thought about the characteristics of superheroes: they have powers, a weakness, a mission, and a disguise.

In Peter's case, both his powers and weakness reside in his male body.

His weakness revealed

His weakness was revealed the instant Mandy wet her pants in class. He was placed on the other side of the door. He was unable to help. Not only that, if he had helped her, he could have been suspected of improper behaviour. Even though he was

valued for his differences, and working in a sacred place, he was powerless for these few moments.

In superhero tales, the Evil Enemies attempt to use the superhero's weakness against him, to their advantage. In this case, Mandy was unaware of her effect on the superhero. She did not act intentionally. Her young body was unable to cooperate with the demands of the school. However, no matter what her intentions, Peter's responses were just as real.

Mandy, like Claudette, seemed to possess an inordinate power. She had the power to place the teacher on the other side of the door, and the potential to affect his career. His life work, his career goals, his mission as a teacher, his very income to support his family, are all dependent upon the children. He would not be an elementary teacher without them. His male body provides him with additional status, the possibility of changing lives, being a father figure and male role model. So his body was simultaneously the source of his powers and his weakness. They are closely linked, contributing to the precarious nature of his life in school.

Thinking about Peter as a superhero, forces me to think about "power". Because men are associated with power in our patriarchal society, it is no surprise that superheroes are usually men.

A look at his power

Writing about the portrayal of men in history text books, Kuzmic (2000) states that central "to the definition and the very existence of patriarchy is the notion of power… Quite simply, to be a man is to possess and exercise power" (p. 118). These powers are usually exhibited as powers over another, and "is something that is done to

others and is embedded in a configuration of unequal relations between those who hold powers and those who don't" (p. 118). This reminded me of the superhero in stories: he always displays power over the Evil Enemies. A superhero has clearly defined powers, and performs his deeds in ways that demonstrate his power over another. The superhero subdues evil people, saves innocent people and changes the course of history. Even when he disguises himself as an ordinary citizen, we, the reader, knows he is powerful. One of the "primary ways masculinity gets defined through prominent individuals in textbooks has to do with power..." (p. 119), as shown through the exploits of military and political leaders.

In this study, I have named Peter a superhero, based on taped conversations with others in the school. I see now that the "superherofication" of Peter reveals the patriarchal perspective on power. Just as women are rarely superheroes, women teachers are never superheroes. They are "only" superhuman. Women are expected to demonstrate their ability to care for children, to maintain the domestic sites and to look after others. That may be superhuman, but that is expected of women. The difference is in the power. As Kuzmic states, "to be a man is to possess and exercise power" (p. 119).

Peter, as a male, has power over others: children, (women) teachers, illiteracy and "old masculinity" (since he is the embodiment of "new masculinity"). He has the power to change destiny, as expressed by the parents of children in his class.

But I see an essential dichotomy: if he is a superhero, can he be a "New Man"? Is not the superhero an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity? I wonder how he can demonstrate different ways of being masculine and give up the possession of power.

In addition, in superhero stories, the domestic does not exist. We never see superheroes perform domestic tasks. We never see superheroes doing ordinary things such as eating, cooking, sleeping or watching videos on Saturday night with their children. They do not experience love, have partners or live in a house.

Some superheroes are seen working, but only as part of their "disguise" to hide their secret identity. To hide his identity as a superhero, he takes on a career, such as reporter or millionaire philanthropist, but never as a house husband or school teacher. For Peter, the workplace does not create his secret identity as an ordinary citizen, but rather his work is where he becomes the superhero. When he leaves the building he becomes an ordinary citizen.

To be a superhero means to live a split existence, as one identity must always hide the other identity. Thus the superhero cannot allow himself to fall in love, or raise children, because the ongoing relationships would threaten his hidden identity. In many ways, Peter lived this split existence by being super at school and real at home.

As Kuzmic (2000) points out in his study of history texts, men are defined as public figures. Public and private "are viewed as separate, dichotomized realms" (p. 121) and the public realm of men is associated with reason, mind and knowledge. The private realm is associated with passion, desire and body. Women look after the private realm of home and family.

This is precisely why Peter cannot fulfil this role: he cannot be a superhero in the private, domestic world of women and children unless he is simply saving them from disaster.

What would the other parents say?

As I reflected on Mandy's needs, or about Claudette's yelling and grabbing story, I thought about the other parents. Peggy, the parent who told me that Peter "did wonders for my son" (taped conversation, September 24, 1999), started me thinking about his status as a superhero. She expressed such faith in Peter's work with her son that she wanted Ellen, her daughter, in his class. Another couple, Albert and Janine, told me that Mr. Thompson was "the greatest thing since sliced bread" (taped conversation, March 14, 2000), who showed their son, Jeff, that teachers are ordinary people.

Neither of these parents had difficulties with this teacher. Albert and Janine thought he was completely approachable and Peggy stopped in after school at least once a week to talk to Peter. Peter did not need to call these parents after a crisis, because no crises occurred. He did not yell at or grab their children. If he needed to speak to either of them about classroom behavior, the parents would respond with support. In fact, Peggy was often expressing her concerns about Ellen's classroom work and behaviors, and wanted Peter to treat her firmly. If she heard that Peter had spoken to harshly to Ellen, she would come in to find out what Ellen had done. She would trust his reactions to Ellen. She would likely say she must have deserved it.

The parents of both Mandy and Claudette lacked communication with him. While both Ellen and Jeff would be described as "good" children who loved school, Claudette and Mandy were experiencing difficulties and did not like school.

With Ellen and Jeff, (and their parents) Peter was a superhero. With Mandy and Claudette, he was not. As a teacher, he needs to figure out how to support the learning of each child, while each child shapes Peter in different ways.

A Superhero has a mission

Peter's expressed his personal mission when he stated that our goal as teachers "is to try to raise, and help develop, well adjusted kids who are responsible contributors to society" (taped conversation, January 12, 2000).

Everyone agreed that Peter teaches because he has a mission. For example, Albert and Janine told me that "he's not here for the job - he puts himself into his work" (taped conversation, March 14, 2000). Annette told me that "his peace comes across" (taped conversation, January 6, 2000).

Yet, when confronted with Mandy's wet pants, Peter turned over her direct care to the secretaries. The door between Mandy and Peter revealed the limits of his involvement with this child. He brought her bag of extra clothes, waited nearby and called her parents. He did as much as he could and did not abandon her. But did he help her become a well adjusted kid? Will his influence help her become a responsible contributor to society, or optimize her human potential? We do not know.

Investigating one tiny event is unfair. Yet this reminds me that teachers can become mired in the everyday, and never see the life long. Mandy entered and exited Peter's classroom quickly. Unless Peter meets her later, he will never know how he influenced her life.

I wonder if Peter will maintain these lofty missions? He entered teaching with enthusiasm and joy. His shaping is influenced by children such as Mandy. While mothers such as Peggy often told him that he was a great teacher, he barely met Mandy's mom, and all she said was that Mandy did not like school.

One tiny story will not destroy his mission, but over time, the thousands of stories certainly influence his mission. His status as superhero becomes more precarious.

Reflecting on Mandy and the three strong stories

I am developing my reflections on these stories. To view this research as a collage invites reflection, and I notice ways the pieces overlap, connect and create different perspectives. In addition, for me, this study has raised larger questions about schools and men and women, boys and girls.

Identities, state Clandinin and Connelly (1999), "have histories. They are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed identity … or they may continue to grow and change" (p.95). Peter's story showed me how identities grow and change. When Peter is storied by others as "father figure" or "male role model", these constructions seem to solidify into a fixed identity. Yet, Peter's experience, as revealed in his stories, indicate that his multiple identities are complex, and continue to grow and change. It is not simple to be man in this place. It is different from being a woman in this place. Maleness shapes his experience every moment of every day.

Greene (1995) says, that post modernism "thinks of persons in pursuit of themselves, and, it is hoped, of possibilities for themselves" (p. 41). By choosing to teach young children, Peter was seeking possibilities for himself. He wished to work with children, to live out his values at work and at home, to be an effective teacher, to help children learn to read and write, to open doors in their future. He does not wish to be constructed by others in ways that limit his possibilities. He hopes to be known as a

"good teacher," and not necessarily as a "good male teacher." But he also wants to be known as a "good man," and so the intersection of these identities is experienced as contradictions.

Kimmel and Messner (1989) tell us that "our identity as men is developed through a complex process of interaction with the culture in which we both learn the gender scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable" (p. 10). Peter, and perhaps the other men on staff, are modifying their scripts. They go on say that "the experience of masculinity is not uniform and universally generalizable to all men in our society" (p.10). To me this means that there are many ways in our society to be a man. When Peter was described as different from other men, the reality is, all men are different from other men. Furthermore, Peter showed us that even within one man's life, the experience of masculinity changes from moment to moment, with the context and the relationships.

Peter's shaping as a teacher is influenced by his maleness. While he is always valued, he is also vulnerable. In addition, Thorne (1997) says that "(g)ender-marked moments seem to express core truths: that boys and girls are separate and fundamentally different as individuals and groups" (p. 44). Yet, Peter's story shows that gender is more complex. Thorne goes on to say that children's "gender relations can be understood only if we map the full array of their interactions – occasions when boys and girls are together as well as those when they separate" (p. 44). In this study, I captured moments when men and women are together, and moments when they separate. I seemed to hear, over and over again, that men teachers were different from women teachers, that Peter brought balance and a different perspective, in addition to being a role model. Yet, I saw moments

when gender was unmarked. In daily classroom life, Peter and his female colleagues were more the same than they were different. At the same time Mandy showed that walls also existed between the men and women.

This study is also about women. When I taped conversations with staff and parents about Peter, I met with five men and thirty-five women. If present trends continue, there will be fewer men in elementary schools. If it is true that men like Peter are valued as good role models, then are three men on a staff like Eastside Elementary enough? Will one good man do it? Perhaps, rather than asking how we might encourage more men to enter teaching, we need to ask what it is like for boys and girls, when there are truly no men in their lives. We could wonder if women need to figure out what are good practices for boys, or are good teaching practices equally good for boys and girls? We could wonder what it is like for women teachers, to work for 35 years with so many women.

We might also wonder if men and women have different "essential natures", because this study seems to show me that we do not. However, as long as people believe we are different, then differences are observed. Thorne asks two other questions that apply to this study. "Is gender always relevant? Do some parts of social life transcend it?" (p. 47). I cannot answer with certainty. In Peter's classroom, surrounded by children, it felt like we transcended gender. It seemed like gender did not matter. Yet, Mandy showed us that it is always relevant, always present.

Peter's dedication to teaching was clear. But I wonder if the absence of men shows us that children are not valued in our culture, and, perhaps the future is not valued. Perhaps we are truly living for today. Does this imbalance reveal the deep-rooted sexism

in our society? In our patriarchal society, it seems to me, if children were highly valued, men would be present. The high numbers of women present in day care centers and elementary schools, demonstrate that women look after children. I wonder, then, if we can ever have gender equity, when most children in our society continue to be raised by women?

This study of Peter Thompson has helped me to look at teachers, children and schools from new perspectives. While I began with a study into male teachers, rooted in my own experiences as a male teacher, I have been able to see that everything in schools connects in complex ways. Gender is one aspect of social life.

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